

THE PERMANENCY PLANNER

Michigan's Foster Care Review Board Program

Supporting safe and timely permanency through review, advocacy, and collaboration.

Winter 2007-8



"Nothing you do for children is ever wasted. They seem not to notice us, hovering, averting our eyes, and they seldom offer thanks, but what we do for them is never wasted." Garrison Keillor



Everything You Wanted To Know About the Federal Child and Family Services Review (But Didn't Know You Should Be Asking)

By Jim Novell, Program Manager



The federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), now scheduled for early 2009, appears to be one of the better kept secrets throughout the statewide child welfare community, despite Michigan's failure to achieve substantial conformance in the first federal review in 2002. Michigan was not alone, however. None of the other 49 states achieved substantial conformance in the first round of reviews. This "nationwide failure" might explain our complacency in getting the word out regarding the importance of this review.

This review is conducted by the Children's Bureau within the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. It is based on federal requirements outlined in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Public Law 105-89 (ASFA), and related aspects of Title IV-E/B of the Social Security Act. The ASFA legislation was designed to help states achieve more timely permanency decisions and establish stronger safety guarantees for abused and neglected children.

Most federal reviews assess a state's compliance with procedural requirements, as was the case with the recent Title IV-E review. The CFSR however, assesses conformity with the requirements of the above-referenced federal child welfare legislation in relationship to the **outcomes** each state achieves for children and families in the vital areas of **child safety, timely permanency and child well being**.

The Children's Bureau uses the CFSR to ensure that the states will remain committed to continuous quality improvement in their child welfare systems.

The CFSR incorporates seven outcome factors and seven systemic factors to measure positive outcomes for children. The outcomes measured include:

- Whether children under the care of the state are protected from abuse and neglect;
- Whether children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate;
- Whether children have permanency and stability in their living conditions;

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- Whether the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children;
- Whether families have enhanced capacity to provide for meeting their children's needs;
- Whether children receive appropriate and adequate services to meet their educational needs;
- Whether children receive appropriate and adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

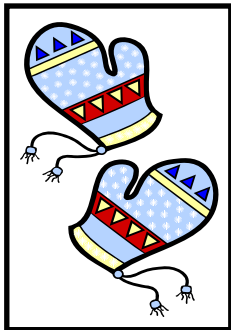
The systemic factors (capacities needed to achieve identified outcomes) measured include:

- The effectiveness of the state's computer systems for gathering and analyzing child welfare data and information;
- The efficiency and effectiveness of the case (court) review system;
- State agency internal and external quality assurance;
- Training of child welfare staff, foster parents, and other stakeholders;
- The array of services available to address the needs of children and families;
- The agency's responsiveness to the community and ability to collaborate with stakeholders and service providers to bring about positive outcomes for children and families;
- Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention.



OUTCOMES

Outcomes are determined by the following means:



- 1) Comparing state child welfare data on safety, timely permanency, and child well being with national standards;
- 2) Through an assessment of qualitative information related to the above factors;
- 3) Through review of case records and interviews with children, parents, and other stakeholders; and
- 4) Through review of system components, processes, and statutory requirements that are established by the state to produce positive outcomes for children and families served by the state child welfare system.

If the review shows that the state has not achieved required outcomes in the areas of safety, timeliness, and child well being, financial penalties are accrued in relationship to nonconformance with one or more of the above 14 factors. Penalties can potentially run into the millions of dollars of federal money lost, resulting in a greater burden on county child care funds.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

Each CFSR is a two-stage process consisting of a statewide self-assessment and an onsite review of child and family service outcomes and program systems. For the statewide self-assessment, the Children's Bureau prepares and transmits to the state the data profiles that contain aggregate data on the state's foster care and in-home service populations. The data profiles allow each state to compare certain safety and permanency data indicators with national standards determined by the Children's Bureau. Focus groups, surveys, and case readings in select counties assist the state in its evaluation of conformity to the required outcomes.

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After the statewide self assessment is completed, a joint federal-state team conducts an onsite review of the state child welfare program, in partnership with state child welfare staff and consultant reviewers who supplement the federal review team.

The onsite portion of the review includes:

- (1) Case record reviews;
- (2) Interviews with children and families engaged in services; and
- (3) Interviews with community stakeholders, such as the courts and community agencies, foster families, and caseworkers and service providers.

At the end of the onsite review, states that have not achieved substantial conformity in all areas assessed must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) addressing the areas of nonconformity. The PIP is developed collaboratively by the state agency and key stakeholders, particularly the courts.

During the PIP process, the Children's Bureau supports the state with technical assistance and then monitors implementation of the PIP. Achieving the objectives outlined in the PIP can reduce federal penalties and help the state improve outcomes for children and families. It also improves the state's chances of achieving substantial conformity in subsequent federal reviews.

MICHIGAN'S STATUS

Michigan's first Child and Family Services Review was conducted in 2002. The state failed to achieve substantial conformity in a number of areas. A Program Improvement Plan (PIP) was created and has since been implemented, resulting in a significant reduction of the 2002 review's conditional financial penalties.

Michigan is scheduled for its next onsite review in early 2009. In preparation, the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) is conducting a self-assessment that includes focus groups of DHS staff and community stakeholders (including the Foster Care Review Board).

The DHS and the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) will collaborate to keep local courts throughout the state well informed and prepared for the upcoming review process and to ensure that the courts fully understand their responsibility to help Michigan achieve substantial conformance with CFSR requirements. A statewide CFSR webcast is scheduled for February 21, 2008. That webcast will be archived for future reference through the SCAO website. Regional trainings with family court administrators and family division judges and referees will be conducted in April and May 2008.

For comprehensive information regarding the Child and Family Services Review, please go to www.childwelfare.gov or www.courtsandchildren.org. For additional information regarding Michigan's involvement with the CFSR, please go to www.michigan.gov/dhs click on the foster care link.





Judge Stephen W. Rideout

----- Annual Training -----

**November 2007
Frankenmuth, Michigan**

The first day of our two-day conference was sponsored and funded by both the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) and the SCAO Court Improvement Program (CIP). The day focused on the need for judicial leadership to expedite safe and timely permanency for children in foster care. This joint conference educated child welfare professionals about the need for increased collaboration between local courts and child welfare agencies, a need emphasized in a 2004 report by the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

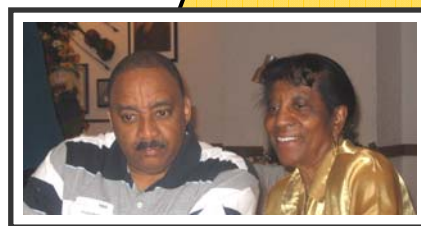
We worked closely with Carol Siemon, CWS Training and Development Manager, to develop sessions that targeted a professionally diverse audience of FCRB board members and staff, judges, referees, prosecutors, attorneys, LGALs, CASAs, and caseworkers.

As a result of this collaboration, we were honored to have as our keynote speaker Judge Stephen Rideout, a retired chief judge from Alexandria, Virginia, who is a noted child welfare and juvenile justice consultant to several national organizations. Judge Rideout discussed how the courts can create a collaborative environment that promotes open communication and dialogue throughout the system, particularly between the courts and the child placing agency. He emphasized that jurists must be assertive in obtaining the information they need, and should encourage idea sharing and creative problem solving by the professionals who make life-changing decisions about the best interests of children.

Sessions through the remainder of the first day focused on factors that courts must consider when determining the best interests of children in child protective proceedings.

Dr. Pamela Ludolph, a licensed clinical psychologist and a University of Michigan associate professor, offered insights about how abuse and neglect impact children's neurological development. She shared the latest findings regarding attachment issues, particularly those that occur with multiple changes in placement or inadequate placement. She also addressed how to determine when children are developmentally advanced enough to competently speak for themselves in child protection proceedings.

*A special THANK
YOU to Elon-
Eloni Wilks and
Fred Durhal for
taking these
pictures!*



Fred Durhal and E'lon-Eloni Wilks

Frank Vandervort, a clinical assistant professor of law with the Child Advocacy Law Clinic at the University of Michigan Law School spoke about the legal considerations in determining the best interests of a child in protective proceedings. Mr. Vandervort also emphasized the court's responsibility to understand the individual child's needs and the parent's capacity to consistently meet those needs. He said that the court must closely monitor the parents' capacity and motivation to change their behavior toward their child. These factors typically can be assessed early in the case based on the parent's initial participation in and response

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counter clockwise from lower left:

Ida Coleman-Estell, Michael Eberth, Carol Coccia, Ed Holovka, Earlester Monroe, Toyur Mackey, Brenda Boyd, Warren Harrison, Tonie Dance.



Romal and Willie Jane Griggs

to services offered. Too often, jurists continue to give additional time to parents who have already demonstrated that they have neither the motivation nor the capacity to make the changes necessary to safely parent their children.

The second day of the annual training conference was reserved for the Foster Care Review Board volunteers. This day included a general business meeting and program update. The day's highlight was certainly the captivating and emotional presentation by Jeanne Fowler, a former foster child, and now a child advocate, writer, speaker, and artist. Jeanne candidly discussed her childhood and the many years of abuse and neglect she suffered at the hands of both her mother and several sets of foster parents.

Throughout her presentation, she explained and gave examples of the subtle actions and common behaviors that often indicate ongoing abuse, but which are repeatedly (and tragically) overlooked by law enforcement, social workers, teachers, neighbors, and others.



Jeanne Fowler

In conclusion, our board members found this year's two-day annual training to be educational and enlightening. All were glad to have the opportunity to interact with other child welfare professionals during the combined sessions. We hope that the information gained will assist them in their efforts to ensure safe and timely permanency for children in our foster care system.



Jim Novell

*Program Representatives (clockwise from top left)
Toyur Mackey, Brenda Baker-Mbacke',
Jeanette Bridges, Gayle Robbert*

----- The Best Interests of the Child -----

By Carol Coccia

FCRB Wayne County Board #9, MAFK member, and a 28-Year Foster Parent

"The best interests of the child" may sound like an old cliché, but it remains an important goal we all strive to achieve.

The government tries to help with laws and money -- lots of laws but seldom enough money. The legal system tries to help with rules and free legal representation for children. We follow the rules, but those rules sometimes leave no room for considering the child's feelings, emotions, or attachments. And we depend on the children's court-appointed attorneys, who sometimes know too little about their little "clients."



I believe, based on my 28 years as a foster parent, that the most important parts of the mix are knowledgeable, well-trained caregivers, including foster parents and kinship families. Every child in care has been traumatized by the removal from his or her parents. A well-trained caregiver can advocate for the child with the government, courts, attorneys, and the rest of the outside world. A cute kid on the lap of a caregiver who is advocating publicly for Medicaid services for foster children can accomplish a lot! (For the record, I do not believe this is "using" the child; the child has a right to attend a politician's town meeting with Mom.)

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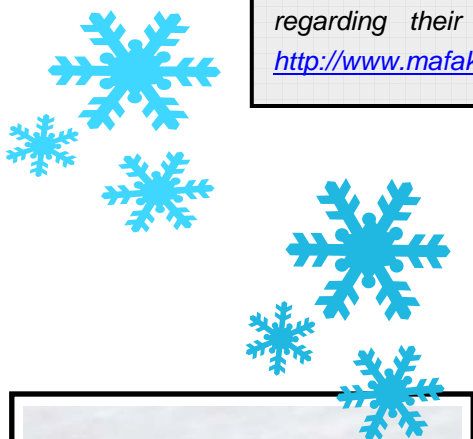
A well-trained caregiver also can ensure that the attorney and judge on the child's case get to know that little person and see that he or she is not just a name on a piece of paper. Caregivers can send a note, a picture, or other personalized update to these people; invite them to the home to visit with the child; or call the LGAL and offer to save everyone else some time by bringing the child to the LGALs office. If the social worker is not effectively seeking local services, making appointments, or setting up school meetings, the well-trained caregiver can do those things.

By the caregiver taking these simple actions, the child becomes a person, rather than just a case number; and, most importantly, the best interests of the child are addressed. A well-trained caregiver is a valuable team member and is most able to serve the child. Caregivers *know* the child. They are the at-home therapists. They can promote good relationships between the children and birth families, agency personnel, and all the other involved parties.

Kinship providers (in contrast to unrelated foster parents) are not required to have foster parent training, but that training would most certainly help them handle the difficult situations that arise while caring for these traumatized children. A substantial percentage of the calls made to the Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents (MAFAK*) are from kinship providers requesting help. As concerned citizens, we should push for top-notch training for these dedicated family caregivers.

Again, do foster children present hopeless or depressing scenarios? Not at all! But we must keep trying, keep doing. "Bloom where you are planted" means do what you can, wherever you are, whatever your circumstances. Think about what *you* can do for the best interests of children. And then, *please do it!*

* **The Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents**, (MAFAK) is the nationally recognized foster parent support organization in Michigan. Their mission is to assist in the recruitment, retention and empowerment of families to successfully parent all children place in foster homes by providing training, advocacy, legislation and support groups. Membership information as well as information regarding their up coming training conference can be found at <http://www.mafak.msu.edu>

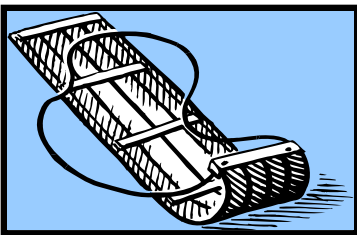


Q & A CORNER

"In my county, DHS gives classes for new foster parents. Would board members benefit from attending these classes?" (Frances Arquette, board #27)

Yes, it most likely would benefit board members to attend the classes. However, the Department of Human Services (DHS) may not allow anyone other than foster parents to attend. We suggest that you contact your local DHS office and ask if board members, too, may attend. (Your local FCRB assistant can assist you with contact information, if needed.)





VOICE 2 Lists Ten Properties for DHS in Helping Foster Youths Leaving Care

Report Cites Progress on Original Recommendations



Release date: Dec. 20, 2007

Contact: Colleen Steinman or Maureen Sorbet (517-373-7394)

Foster youths today presented DHS Director Ismael Ahmed with a report outlining ten priorities to guide the Michigan Department of Human Services as it cares for foster youths soon to leave the state's custody.

"Voice 2: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan Foster Youth" is the work of 18 youth boards representing 28 counties. It evaluates the progress on the youth boards' original 15 recommendations issued in 2005 and asks DHS and the Michigan courts to continue working on issues critical to young adults who will soon leave or have recently left foster care.

Some of the recommendations include devoting resources to keep families together, maintaining sibling connections, involving youths in decisions and ensuring youths have education and housing before leaving foster care. A very important focus is the need for all young people to have a permanent connection to a caring adult before they leave foster care. The full document can be viewed on www.michigan.gov/dhs in the Spotlight box.

"I am grateful for their efforts," Ahmed said. "Their voices have been heard. Changes in DHS practice and policy help foster youths grow into productive, contributing adults."

A study of former foster youths in three Midwestern states found that those who left foster care at age 18 were:

- Three times more likely than their peers who had not been in foster care to be unemployed or not in school.
- Twice as likely to be unable to pay their rent.
- Fewer than half had bank accounts.
- 30 percent of the males and 11 percent of the females had been incarcerated at least once after leaving foster care.

A survey of 237 Michigan foster youths ages 18-23 found similar outcomes. Only 12 percent were employed full time and only 36 percent were working part time. More than half were on public assistance and 40 percent said they were either homeless or had no stable housing.

"The youth boards are critical to helping change these outcomes," said Kate Hanley, who manages DHS permanency programs. "We're making excellent progress in addressing their most basic needs, but there is more to be done and this document helps articulate where we can devote our resources to do the most good."

The youths want to see more resources devoted to preserving families through supports that allow them to remain safely with their birth parents. If they must be removed from the home, they want a "Sibling Bill of Rights" that allows them to be placed with their siblings or have structured contact with them. The youths also want to have a say in decisions made about their placement. "Nothing about us without us," is the motto caseworkers are urged to adopt in team decision-making meetings that determine where a youth will be placed.

Supports to help youths learn to drive and obtain a driver's license, apply for higher education financial aid and obtain important life skills such as financial planning are critical to help the transition from foster youth to adult, the report states.

For more information and copies of Voice 2 and the progress report on Voice 1, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.michigan.gov/fyit

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Casey Family Programs Grant Keeps "Aging Out" Youth Program Running

A project that helps Wayne County foster children aging out of care is to continue thanks to a 2-year, \$800,000 grant from the Seattle-based Casey Family Programs, officials said Tuesday.

Creating Independence and Outcomes is one of five programs nationwide that helps current and former foster youths ages 17-20 obtain career-related skills.

In the past three years, about 150 Wayne County foster kids have attained job skills under the program.

The project has been funded by the Michigan Departments of Labor and Economic Growth and Human Services.

The grant is to provide the state with \$200,000 in 2007 and \$600,000 in 2008.



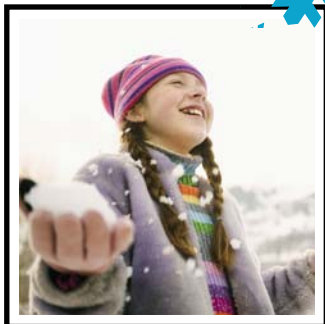
New Youth in Transition Web Site

<http://www.michigan.gov/fyit>

The Michigan Department of Human Services recently launched a new web site offering advice and opportunities to foster children who are "aging out" of Michigan's child welfare system. This web site was the result of a recommendation made by the Statewide Task Force on Youth Transitioning from Foster Care in 2006. Over 100 members from public and private organizations that care about improving services to foster youth participated. Youth representatives were part of the Task Force and acted as a lead for each of the six subcommittees that consisted of the State Court Administrative Office, Child Welfare Services Division; the Governor's Task Force on Children's Justice; the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Institute; the Office of the Children's Ombudsman; and Children's Charter of the Courts of Michigan.

This is a Web site with information on a variety of issues important to current and former foster youth. The site provides links on how to develop supports, find services, get answers to important questions and just keep you posted on what's new.

The Web site will be updated by members of Michigan's Youth Boards from locations across the state.



2008 MEETINGS & TRAININGS



FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD

March 7	FCRB Executive Committee Meeting (Detroit-phone)
March 28	FCRB Advisory Committee Meeting (Lansing)
April 24-25	FCRB New Member Orientation (Lansing)
Nov. 5-7	FCRB Annual Training Conference (Ann Arbor)
	(Contact: Kathy Falconello 313-972-3288)



SCAO - CHILD WELFARE TRAININGS

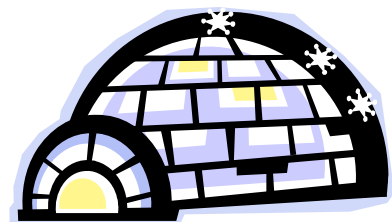
LUNCHEON WEBCASTS

Webcast registration: <http://courts.michigan.gov/mji/>
 Contact: Joy Thelen, thelenj@courts.mi.gov, 517-373-5322

March 27	Self-Inflicted Violence
April 24	Reducing Trauma to Children During Removal and Placement
May 29	Title IV-E Update
June 19	Improving the Legal System's Approach to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning Youth in Foster Care
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March 3	Substance-Affected Children in the Court System (E.Lansing) Contact: Jennifer Doerr, Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Mich (PAAM) 517-334-6060
April 9-10	Every Step of the Way: Safety for Children Living with Domestic Violence (East Lansing). Contact: Deborah Jensen, Children's Charter of the Courts - 517-482-7533
May 2	Children's Law Section Annual Training
May 14	Representing Parents in Child Protective Proceedings (Lansing) Contact: Joy Thelen 517-373-5322
June 3	Legal Issues Regarding Fathers' Involvement (Lansing) Contact: Joy Thelen 517-373-5322
July 15	Dealing with Absent Parents: Implementing the Absent Parent Protocol and What to do About Incarcerated Parents (Lansing) Contact: Joy Thelen 517-373-5322
August 12	Engaging Fathers: Resources and Programs for Full Engagement (Lansing) Contact: Joy Thelen 517-373-5322
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Guidelines for Achieving Permanency in Child Protective Proceedings: Regional Trainings on the "Yellow Book." (For DHS and private agency)
 Contact: Deborah Jensen, Children's Charter of the Courts - 517-482-7533

March 13	Grand Rapids
April 17	Lansing
May 2	Gaylord
May 27	Livonia



To submit articles or to request an electronic copy of this newsletter, please contact Kathy Falconello at FalconelloK@courts.mi.gov (313-972-3288).

Visit the FCRB webpage
at

<http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/fcrb/fcrb.htm> for program and contact information, annual reports, previous newsletters, applications for board membership, request for review forms, and links to other related foster care programs and services.

Adopt Us Kids
<http://www.adoptuskids.org/>

Child Welfare.com
<http://www.childwelfare.com/index.htm>

Foster Youth in Transition
<http://www.michigan.gov/fyit>

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
<http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/>

National Foster Care Review Coalition
<http://nfcrc.net/default.aspx>

Mentor Michigan
<http://www.michigan.gov/mentormichigan>

Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange
1-800-589-MARE
www.adoptionfestival.org

Michigan Assoc. for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents
<http://www.mafak.msu.edu/>

Michigan Court Improvement Program
<http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/cip/cip.htm>

Michigan Federation for Children & Families
www.michfed.org

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